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A top-notch resume stands above the rest

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Want to stand out in a sea of applicants? You're going to need a powerful resume - one that sets you apart from other candidates in the blink of an eye.

"You never get a second chance at a first impression. Your resume is the first impression hiring managers will have of you. You want to put your best foot forward," said Scott Vest, vice president of human resources and training for Nexeo, a Utah-based staffing and consulting firm.

Powerful resumes are concise, well-written and on-point. They are tailored to a specific position, use facts and figures to support claims and are easy to navigate.

"Employers view resumes as the first work assignment," said Lisa Quast, certified executive coach and author of "Your Career, Your Way" (\$20, WingSpan Press). "How well an applicant did creating their resume gives employers a great indication of how seriously the applicant will take their work, if hired."

BE SPECIFIC

A powerful resume matches the job posting. Forget the one-size-fits all resume. Tailor your resume to the specific position -- and keep an eye out for the important keywords.

"It is your job to prove to the employer that you are the right person for the job. You cannot do this with a resume that is too general in nature," said Patrick Madsen, director of programs and education for career services at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School in Baltimore.

Those answers come in the form of keywords. Determine the top keywords in the posting and, when applicable, use the same keywords in your resume.

If the employer wants someone experienced in Microsoft Excel, for example, be sure list Microsoft Excel in your skills and play up your experience with the program in your previous employment.

"With online recruiting, the recruiter or hiring manager isn't going to take the time to read your resume," Vest explained. "They will scan the resumes and reduce the candidate pool to those who best match the description.

"If you send a generic or standard resume to different postings, you reduce your chances of catching the hiring manager's eye."

Think of it as the interview before the interview. "The single most important thing to remember is, 'Why you?'" Madsen said. "The job description is the employer giving you the answers to the question that they have. Use those answers in your resume."

BE CONCISE

A powerful resume gets to the point. Employers won't take the time to wade through wordy resumes, so don't be tempted to add a bunch of filler. Highlight your skills and achievements that relate directly to the position at hand and omit extraneous details.

"Employers are more likely to read a resume that is organized efficiently, with the proper relevant information first and highlighted so that they can find it fast. They do not want to have to search for it," Madsen said.

Make it easy for them to find the information they need by using short bullet points rather than long sentences or full paragraphs.

BE DETAILED

A powerful resume provides hard data. Think of your resume as an advertisement. Swap vague statements for specifics and quantify your accomplishments with facts and figures.

"The most important thing to consider when crafting an impressive resume is to quantify the impact of key accomplishments for each job listed because employers are looking for people who add value to companies," Quast said.

Show employers the value you bring to a company by putting a number on your achievements. Instead of writing, "Lead sales person for two years running," back it up with numbers: "Improved sales by 40 percent, generating an all-time high of \$300,000 in new client revenue."

BE METICULOUS

A powerful resume must be perfect. "With a saturated candidate pool, it's an employer's market," said Jaded Ryndak, regional manager for Paladin Recruiting and Staffing headquartered in Chicago. "HR and hiring managers must wade through hundreds of resumes. They are looking for reasons to rule out candidates."

Typos, spelling mistakes, poor writing and sloppy layouts give them that reason. Ask at least two people to edit your resume -- and don't ask your best friend or your mom. Enlist the help of your professional peers.

"A resume reflects the quality of work a company can expect from you, so pick at least one editor from your target industry to assure that the wording, titles and accomplishments in your resume resonate," Ryndak said.